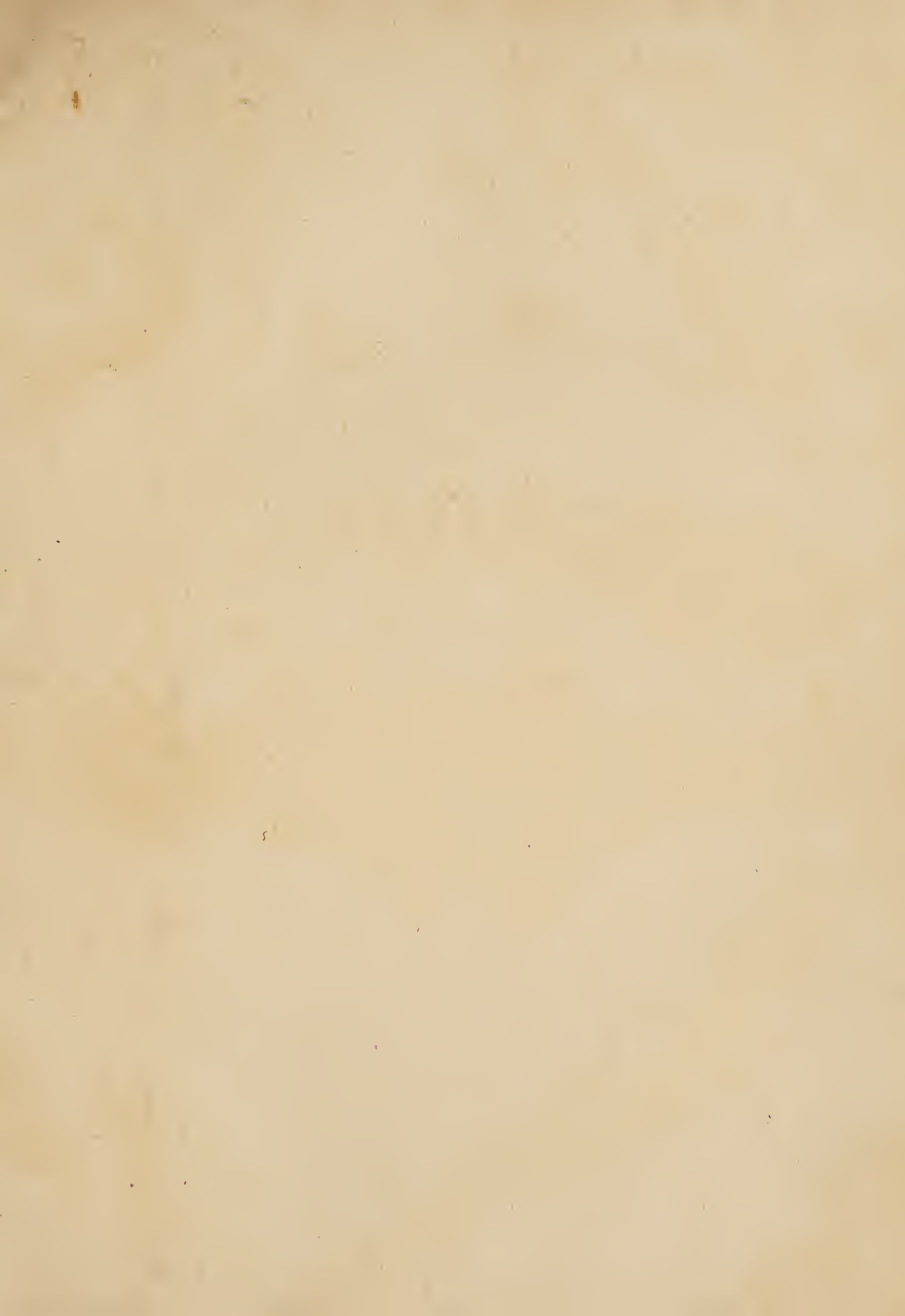




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James T. Bell



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Letter

# ENQUIRY

INTO

*Debat*  
Occasional Conformity.

Shewing that the

# DISSENTERS

Are no Way Concern'd in it.

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By the Author of the *Preface* to Mr. *Howe*.

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L O N D O N :

Printed in the Year M. DCC. II.







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A N  
ENQUIRY  
I N T O  
Occasional Conformity.

**H**E that Opposes his own Judgment against the Current of the Times, ought to be back'd with unanswerable Truths; and he that has that Truth on his Side, is a Fool, as well as a Coward, if he is afraid to own it because of the Currency or Multitude of other Mens Opinion.

'Tis hard for a Man to say, all the World is Mistaken but himself; but if it be so who can help it?

But since 'tis not likely a Single Vote shou'd prevail upon Espous'd Errors, in an Age when every one is so fond of themselves, he that Starts Truth by himself must expect the World will stand still and look on till they see the Issue.



The Act depending in the House of Commons about Occasional Conformity has set abundance of Heads to Work in the World; and be the House in the Right, or in the Wrong, I know my own Business, and their Temper, too well to meddle with it: But I pretend to say, that all Men I have met with, who have meddled with the Argument, either in Print or otherwise, are manifestly Mistaken.

With more Humility therefore than I owe to any Man, I ask leave not to be Censur'd till I am Heard; and those who call me Arrogant before, reprove me with more Arrogance than is their share among their Fellow Creatures.

But since I, *who was altogether Born in Sin*, have Undertaken to teach my Superiors, I desire to explain my self before they cast me out of the Synagogue.

For as that blind Man thought 'twas a Marvellous thing they should not know whence he came that had opened his Eyes.

So to me 'tis every jot as wonderful to find no Body of my Mind, and yet be Positively assured that I am in the Right.

The Subject I am upon needs no Introduction, the History is in every Man's Knowledge; the Parliament are upon a Bill to prevent Occasional Conformity, and about that Bill the Press swarms with Pamphlets;



the Pulpit sounds with Exultations on one Hand, and Deprecations on the other ; every one speak their Opinions, some their Hopes, some their Fears ; and so it shou'd have been to the End of the Chapter, if I cou'd have found but one middle Sort, that, free from Prejudice of Parties, cou'd have discern'd the Native State of the Case as it really is, distinguish'd from the Passions and Follies of Men.

About this Act of Parliament I affirm most of the People I have met with are Mistaken ; and that I may be as Explicit as I can, I shall enquire more particularly who are Mistaken, how, and then I doubt not the Sequel of this Paper shall make it appear that the Fact is true.

*First*, All those People who design'd the Act as a Blow to the Dissenting Interest in *England*, are Mistaken.

*Secondly*, All those who take it as a Prelude or Introduction to the further Suppressing of the Dissenters, and a Step to Repealing the Toleration, or intend it as such, are Mistaken.

*Thirdly*, All those who think the Dissenters at all Concern'd in it, or have design'd to Mortifie them by it, are Mistaken.

*Fourthly*, All those Hot-Spurs of Divinity who Prophesie Destruction from the Pulpit, and from this Step pretend to foretel that the time of Plund'ring their Brethren is at Hand,



*Fifthly*, All those Flegmatick Dissenters who fancy themselves undone, and that Persecution and Desolation is at the Door again, are Mistaken.

*Sixthly*, All those Dissenters who are really at all Disturb'd at it, either as an Advantage gain'd by their Enemies, or as a real Disaster upon themselves, are Mistaken.

*Seventhly*, All those Dissenters who Deprecate it as a Judgment, or wou'd Vote against it, if it were in their Power, are Mistaken.

*Eighthly*, That all those who begun or promoted this Bill with a design to Ruin, Weaken and Destroy, the Interest or Body of the Dissenters in *England*, are Mistaken.

Not that I hereby suppose the Parliament, or the Persons Originally concern'd in moving this Bill, did it in meer Kindness to the Dissenters, in order to Refine and Purge them from the Scandals which some People had brought upon them, that 'twas an Action of Christian Charity to the Dissenters to Prevent and Detect Frauds and Hypocrisie in Religion, and to clear their Reputation.

I never yet saw or read of a Division of Parties in any Nation, but that the Hot Heads of both Parties were always for Enflaming the Reckoning; if the Hot Men of the Dissenters have done any Mischief, I am sorry for it; but let us Examine a little what other Hot Men wou'd be now a doing.



No sooner was Queen *Anne* setl'd upon the Throne of *England*, and had declar'd that the Church of *England* shou'd be the Men of Her Favour, as being the Church She had been Educated in, and ever Constant to, but these Hot Men fly out upon their Brethren with all the Excesses of their furious Temper.

Nothing wou'd serve them, but this Queen, and this Parliament, must, Root and Branch, blast the Dissenters with their Breath, blow up their Interest in the Nation, and we shou'd be all one Church, and one People, of a sudden; 'twas to be done with a Blow all at once, and so certainly, that no possible Doubt could be made of it.

But Her Majesty was pleas'd to let these People know from Her own Mouth, that for as much as concern'd Her, they were Mistaken; in that, upon the Address of the Dissenters to Her, She gave them Her Royal Word for Her Protection, and whenever She breaks it, we shall all be Mistaken.

Upon this the Pulpit, that Drum Ecclesiastick began the War, and Mr. *Sachavrell*, in his Sermon at *Oxford*, Dooms all the Dissenters to Destruction, without either Bell, Book or Candle; not regarding common Decency, not respecting his good Manners to the Queen, nor his Deference to the Parliament; but tells them 'tis their Duty, if they will be true Members of the Church of *England*,



land, to lift up a Standard against the Phanticks, and the like; as much as to say, *Madam, whatever Your Majesty has promis'd, You must break Your Word; and, Gentlemen of the House of Commons, we will have you do it.*

Now all these Gentlemen have liv'd to see themselves Mistaken; and if they retain any Expectations of seeing it fulfill'd, they must exercise their Faith upon it, as a think in *Futuro*, and believe that some time or other Her Majesty will break Her Word; but as yet there is no great Probability, for hitherto we have seen they are all Mistaken.

But to revive their Expectations, comes a Bill into the House for preventing Occasional Conformity; this has been Matter of great Triumph to some Gentlemen, who, upon this Act, revive their common Discourse, and are pleas'd to treat the Dissenters in this manner: *Well, Gentlemen, now down you go; the Parliament are a beginning with you, and they don't use to do Business by halves; they have taken the insulted Church into Consideration; they will reduce you, and this is the first Step; you shall soon see some more on't: We have got a Church Parliament now, and down ye go; this Bill will effectually Ruin your Interest, and bring all your Great Men off from you.*

This brings us close to the Point; and 'tis no small Matter for any one to show these Gentlemen how they are Mistaken.

*First,*



*First*, 'Tis time for these Gentlemen to tell us what the Parliament will do when they either know it, or the House has declar'd their Intentions; and till they have, 'tis a Presumption some Houses would have taken Notice of, for any People to pretend to lead them to their Business; and therefore when they tell us this is a Taste of the rest they are preparing for us, I must say, either they are too well acquainted with the Mind of the House, or they are all Mistaken; and as to the Blow this Bill is to the Dissenters Interest in *England*,

As far as I may be allow'd to give my Judgment, and as the Nature of the Thing seems to speak its self, 'tis plain this Bill is no Damage at all to the Dissenters in *England*, and we hope the House did not intend it as such.

I cannot imagine that so great a Spirit of Enmity and Contempt can be entertain'd in the Breast of a Nation against their Neighbours, their Brethren, People Born in the same Climate, submitting to the same Government, professing the same God, and in most Fundamental Points of Religion agreeing, People link'd together in the same Common Interest, by Intermarriages continually mixt in Relation, concern'd in the same Trade, making War with the same Enemies, and Allied with the same Friends; were it



not that these People, call'd Dissenters, are represented to them under some strange and untrue Character, or that under the Name of Dissenter some ill Persons are shrowded and disguis'd, who deserve to be thus treated.

Wherefore, in order to set the Dissenters Right in the Eyes of their Brethren, and that they may have common Justice at least, if they can have nothing of Courtesie, that Peace may be where there is no Occasion for War, and Quietness, and good Manners, preserv'd, 'twill be needful to set the Matter in a true Light, and examine—who this Dissenter is, what the People call'd Dissenters are, and what they have done, for which they are treated after so Infamous a Manner, by Scurrilous Preachers, and Scandalous Pamphleteers, and other Ignorant People, not a few.

The Dissenter is an *Englishman*, that being something desirous of going to Heaven, having heard his Church of *England* Father, and School-master, and the Minister of the Parish, talk much of it, begins seriously to enquire about the Way thither, and to that Purpose consulting his Bible and his Conscience, he finds that in his Opinion there are some Things in the Establish'd Way of Worship which do not seem to correspond with the Rule he has found out in the Scripture.

Now



Now I shall not examine here whether the Man thus scrupulous be in the Right, or whether the Church be in the Right, it does not at all belong to the Case in Hand.

But the Man being fully convinc'd that he ought to worship God in that Way, exclusive of all others, which is most agreeable to the Will of God reveal'd in the Scripture ; and being on mature Consideration also, and after sincere Endeavours to be otherwise satisfied, fully convinc'd that this Establish'd Way is not so near to that Rule as it ought to be, ventures the Displeasure of the Civil Magistrate in dissenting, in pure Obedience to the Commands of his Conscience, and of that Rule which bids him obey God rather than Man ; firmly believing that 'tis his Duty so to do ; and that the Compass and Extent of Humane Laws do not reach to bind him in Matters of Conscience ; at the same time living in Charity with all the rest of the World whose Consciences do not require the same Restriction, and peaceably submitting to the Laws and Government he lives under, as far as either his Right, as an *Englishman*, or his Duty, as a Christian, can require.

This is the English Protestant Dissenter which I have been speaking of, and concerning whom I have ventur'd to say, so many Men, *so much wiser than I*, are Mistaken.



If there are crept into his Company State Dissenters, Politick Dissenters, or any that give no Reason or other, or less Reasons, for their Dissenting than these, they are not of them, and we wish they would go out from them.

I see no Act of Parliament a making to the Prejudice of this Dissenter; and let Hot Men Preach, Print, and Say, what they please, it is impossible it shou'd ever enter into the Breast of an *English* Protestant Parliament, or an *English* Protestant Queen, either to Oppress or Suppress such a Dissenter.

'Tis for the Protection of this Honest, Well-meaning, Dissenter, that in the late Reign the King and Parliament finding their Number Great, thought it was meet for the Quiet of the Nation, and as an Acknowledgement of the Superiority of Conscience to all Humane Laws, to Settle their Liberty in an Act of Parliament; the same undisputed Authority on which all our Civil, as well as Religious, Rights are Established.

This is the Dissenter to which Her Majesty has promised Her Protection, and this Act of Parliament is the Toleration to Tender Consciences, for which Her Majesty openly declar'd Her Self, even to the Hazard of Her Royal Person.

These are the Dissenters who never gave Her Majesty any Reason to believe they did not Merit Her Protection, and I firmly believe never will

From



From these the Church of *England* has nothing to fear, unless their Exemplar Lives, and Unquestion'd Piety, shou'd prevail to weaken Her Numbers, and we heartily wish all the Strife were reduc'd to this, *viz.* who shou'd Live best, and who shou'd Preach best.

If there are among them Vicious Youths, or Grown Hypocrites; if there are crept in Errors, Heresies and Enthusiasts, are not the same among the Church? If there are among these Dissenters, Quakers, Antinomians, Sweet Singers, Muggletonians, and the like; the Church has also Her Socinians, Deists, Anti-Trinitarians, Scepticks, Afigilites, and the like; there can be no Advantage pleaded against Heresie, and Damnable Heterodox Opinions, from one Side more than another.

If we regard the Matters of State, the Dissenters, and the Church of *England*, have small Advantage of the Argument one against another; and I may without Arrogance Challenge the Hot Church-Men, who can treat them with nothing but the Odious Name of Disturbers of the Peace, Enemies of Monarchy, and Authors of Confusion, to bring the Loyalty of the Church of *England*, so much boasted of in the World, to the Test, with the Loyalty of the Dissenter; and as it has lately been done to my Hand, it is  
ealie



*New Test of  
the Church of  
England's Loy-  
alty, P.*

easy to prove that the Dissenter has been equally Loyal to Princes, equally True to the Government and Constitution of *England*, as the Church; and the Church has been equally Disloyal, and has as often Resisted, and took Arms against, the Lawful Establish'd Power and Prince, as the Dissenter; and let them enter into this Dispute whenever they please.

But what is all this to the present Case? What we do as Englishmen is one thing, and what we do as Christians, and Dissenters, is another.

'Tis also foreign to our Purpose to Examine or Reply to *Dr. Stubbs*, or the Multitude of Pamphleteers, who place themselves at the forelorn Hope of the Church, and begin the War in hopes of drawing on that whole Body to an Engagement; when they can make it out, that the Dissenter and the Church are as far asunder in Religion as God and *Baal*, I may possibly think they Merit what they so much Covet, *viz.* to be Reply'd to.

Whole Reams of Paper are spoil'd since that to prove that this Act of Parliament is needful, because 'tis fit the Church should be Establish'd; to which I Answer with a Question ask'd once with much less Reason in another Case, *What need all this Waste?*

Gentle-



Gentlemen, Establish your Church with all the Precaution you can, Build a Fence of Impregnable Laws about it, you are welcome; we never did, nor we do not now, Disturb you; leave but us, your Poor Brethren, Liberty to serve God according to our Consciences; don't bind us to do as you can do, whether we can or no; take your Places, and Pensions, and Profits, and deserve them of the Nation, if you can; we ask nothing but our Right, and what is now become so by Law; if you claim the Civil Power as your own, you consequently take us into your Protection; and let us see how Generous you'll be.

As to those among us who can Conform to your Church for a Place, for a Salary, you are also welcome to take them among you, and let them be a part of your selves; all the Converts you can make by the Mammon of Unrighteousness are your own; all you can Buy off, or Bribe off, or Fright off, *let 'em go*; we readily Grant, that whoever among us can, with Satisfaction to his Conscience, Conform, ought to Conform; and we heartily Wish you would make some small Steps by way of Condescension to your Brethren, such as might open a Door for us all to Conform to you, and then you shou'd see whether we Dissent from Principles of Obstinacy and Ill Nature, or from a meer Necessity of Con-



Conscience; you should then see whether the Dissenters in *England* were Schismatics by Nature, and Heterodox by Inclination; or whether their Objections are grounded upon Scripture, and their Dissenting from you an Act of an Inlightned Conscience; you wou'd then try the Spirits whether they be of God.

But since you are of the Opinion that you are Capable of no Amendment, that you cannot Reform farther, and therefore will not Condescend one Step, though 'twould bring over Half a Million of Souls to you, *an Eminent Instance of the Charity of your Church*, all we have to say in the Case is, let us have the Protection of the Government, and the Liberty the Laws allow us, and we are Content.

Upon this Score 'tis that we say the Act against Occasional Conformity does not concern us; they who can Conform for One Reason, may conform without Two, and ought to Conform; and we are therefore content to be distinguish'd who cannot Conform at all; and if we might offer so boldly to you, who have any Interest in the *House of Commons*, we would humbly propose to have the Title of the Act alter'd, and to have it Entituled, *An Act for the better Uniting the Protestant Dissenters, by preventing Occasional Conformity to the Church of England*; and when that is done, let it pass with all our Hearts; and



and tho' we can easily see what the Design is, viz. That no Dissenter shall be employ'd in Place of Trust or Profit in the Government, yet since it must be so, *We hope, Gentlemen, you will be content to take all the Miscarriages of the Government on you too*; we shall acquiesce, let us alone in our Religion, let us Worship God as we believe he has directed us, and all the rest is your own.

But before we part let us have leave to remind you, that although we are willing to quit all our Civil Right to the Honours, as well as the Advantages, of serving our Country, when we are chosen to it by a Fair Majority, rather than not enjoy our Religion, and the Profession we make, with Peace and Liberty, yet it is no less an Oppression upon us, and the Hardships are such as can never be defended by Reason or Equity.

We would be glad we had no Cause to think our selves Injur'd; and to such of the Church of *England* who can judge without Prejudice, we would Appeal whether it is not very Hard,

*First*, That the Dissenter shall be excluded from all Places of Profit, Trust and Honour, and at the same time shall not be excused from those which are attended with Charge, Trouble, and Loss of his Time?

C

*Secondly,*



*Secondly*, That a Dissenter shall be Press'd as a Sailor to Fight at Sea, Lifted as a Soldier to Fight on Shore, and let his Merit be never so much above his Fellows, shall never be capable of Preferment; no, not a Lieutenant at Sea, or so much as a Halbert in the Army.

*Thirdly*, That we must maintain our own Clergy, and your Clergy; our own Poor, and your Poor; pay equal Taxes, and equal Duties; and yet not be thought worthy to be Trusted to set a Drunkard in the Stocks.

We wonder, Gentlemen, you will accept our Money on your Deficient Funds, our Stocks to help carry on your Wars, our Loans and Credits to your Victualing Office, and Navy Office.

If you would go on to distinguish us, get a Law made we shall Buy no Lands, that we may not be Freeholders; and see if you could find Money to Buy us out.

Transplant us into Towns and Bodies, and let us Trade by our selves; let us Card, Spin, Knit, Weave, and Work, with and for one another, and see how you'll maintain your own Poor without us.

Let us Freight our Ships apart, keep our Money out of your Bank, accept none of our Bills, and separate your selves as absolutely from us in Civil Matters, as we do from  
you



you in Religious, and see how you can go on without us.

If you are not willing to do this, but we must live among you, Trade, Work, Receive and Pay, together, why may we not do it in Peace, with Love and Unity, without daily Reproach? If we have any Knaves among us, take them; if we have any Hypocrites, any who can Conform, and do not, we are free to part with them, that the Remainder may be all such as agree with the Character here given; and when you have Garbl'd us to your Hearts desire, and ours, you need never fear your Church, as to her Politick Interest in the World; pray then let us be quiet.

What have we to do with your Distinctions of Whig and Tory? No farther than I know of than this, that when, distinct from our Religious Concerns, we come to talk of our Liberties, Properties, and English Priviledges, we are not for having them destroy'd by Absolute Authority, Dispensing Power, and the like; and if this be to be Whigs, ye are all Whigs.

As to Kings and Rulers, we are of the Opinion, that when they Degenerate into Tyrants, Oppress their People, Destroy the Laws, with all the *Et-cætera's* of Arbitrary Power, 'tis Lawful for the Injur'd People to



Reduce them to Reason, and to seek Protection, and Powerful Help, from any Body, to Assist them to Recover their Undoubted Rights and Liberties ; if this be to be Traitors, why then, Gentlemen of the Church of *England*, hold up your Hands ; how say you ? Are you Guilty, or not Guilty ?

*As to Oaths, with which, Gentlemen, ye were the Men that loaded your Allegiance farther than you had any Occasion,* we are of the Opinion, that they can bind the Subject no longer than the Sovereign continues the Protection of the Executive Power ; and that the late King by his Deserting the Throne, Absolv'd all his Subjects from the Bond of their Allegiance ; and on this Foot we made no Scruple to Swear to the Government, as it now stands on the Foot of the late Revolution ; and if you have Sworn with us, and yet do not believe so, you may get off of the Perjury if you can.

And what need is there now of running down the Dissenters with a full Cry, as if this Act a coming out was a Machine to blow them all up ; we see no Harm in it at all, other than the Hardships we mention'd before, most of which we suffer'd before, and are like only to have them the faster entail'd on our Posterity.



All those Gentlemen therefore who think this Act will weaken the Dissenters, or wish it would, are manifestly Mistaken; it may distinguish them better, and I am perswaded will fortifie them in their Honest Profession; 'twill teach them, that if they will hold fast the Truth, they must learn to live like People under the Power of those who hate them, and despightfully use them.

The Dissenters too are strangely Mistaken in their Apprehensions of the Ill Consequences of this Act.

To such I wou'd say, I cannot imagine what they have to fear from it, or why they shou'd be uneasie with the Honour they are also rid of, the Encumbrance of being Mayors, Aldermen, Jurats, and Sheriffs of the Towns and Corporations; and let them but reflect what was the Gain that all the Dissenters in *England* have made by Places and Pensions from the Government since the late Revolution, I am perswaded 'twill not all amount to the Sum that one Churchman will be found to have Cheated the Nation of.

The Church are willing to engross all the Knaves to themselves, and let them do it, and welcome, tho' they get all the Money into the Bargain; if they would but come to a fair Account with us now, and repay all the Dissenters Money the Nation has been Cheated of by Church Knaves, I dare undertake the Dissenters



senters shall repay all that can be Charg'd on their Knaves out of the Ballance.

The Foundation of the Dissenters Safety is lodg'd, by God's Especial Providence, in the Queen's Veracity; while Her Majesty esteems Her Word Sacred, as She has assur'd us She will, we have no Occasion to be concern'd at all.

The Safety of the Dissenters consist in their own Honesty and Integrity; while they do nothing to offend either Her Majesty, or the Laws, if it were possible to have a Parliament of Church Biggots, or of Pulpit *Sacharverells*, there will be no Fear of their Liberty.

As to the present Act, I doubt not but they will live to see Cause to be thankful for the making it, when the Miscarriages of all People in Publick Offices and Employments are so eminently fix'd upon a Party, and so openly and fairly taken off from them.

They are Mistaken too in the Sence of the Present Parliament; and they may be assur'd, had not their Enemies seen that an *English* Protestant Parliament, as this is, is not to be prevail'd upon to Overthrow so Substantial a Part of the Nation's Liberty as is settled in the Act of Toleration, they had not rested so long, but before now had attempted it.

They have try'd it in the Pulpit, scatter'd it in Scandalous Pamphlets from the Press, affirm'd



affirm'd that Toleration is Destructive of the Church's, as well as the Nation's, Safety ; they have endeavour'd, by Calumny and Reproach to blacken the Dissenters with Crimes never Committed ; and which they wou'd never own before, are at last come to represent them as a formidable Party.

And yet all this cou'd never bring so much as One Member of the House to be so blind to his Country's Interest, as to make a Motion against the Act of Toleration.

Being thus disappointed, and willing to play at small Game rather than stand out, they fly to the Sanctuary of this Bill, and feign themselves gratify'd by it more than ever the Bill, or the House it self, intended ; for in all their Arguments for the Bill, 'tis suppos'd to be a Means to Reduce, Humble, and Mortifie the Dissenters ; *Ridiculus Mus* ! Is this all ? Why really, Gentlemen, had it been in our Power, you should have had all this without an Act of Parliament ; this will Strengthen, not Reduce, us ; it will Please, not Mortifie or Humble, us ; and thus you find your selves all Mistaken ; Mistaken in the House of Commons themselves, in thinking the Representatives of a Protestant Nation will Repeal the Act of Toleration, upon which the Tranquility of their Native Country so much depends ; but above all,  
Mistaken



Mistaken in their Expectation of the Queen, to whom their Behaviour is Preposterous and Unmannerly.

'Twas Preposterous for People to expect, that because the Queen was a Friend to the Church, a constant Member, and always Espoused the Interest of the Church, that therefore when She came to the Crown, She must come up to all their Extravagant Heights.

When Her Majesty was Princess, and a Subject, she constantly adher'd to the Interest of the Church ; but at the same time declar'd Her Opinion for tolerating the Dissenters in their Liberty of Protestant Worship, while they behaved themselves quietly and obediently under the Government.

When Her Majesty came to the Crown, She became the general Mother, the Guardian, the Refuge of all Her Subjects ; She places the Church first in Her Favour, promises them Her Special and Particular Care, as those who by Judgment and Inclination She stands engaged with ; but as She finds a great Number of Her People unhappily divided in Opinion, yet in all other Respects Her good Subjects, what can She do less than give them Her Protection ? This She has readily promis'd them, and on this they thankfully depend.

But



But here comes the Gentlemen of the Long Gown, and they tell Her in so many Words, She cannot, She must not, keep Her Word with us; they tell us She will halt between God and *Baal*, if She does not so Declare for the Church, as to her Best to Suppress and Destroy all Separate Worships, and have all the Priests of *Baal*, the best Terms they can bestow on the Dissenting Ministers, hew'd to Pieces before the Lord.

'Tis Unmannerly that the Church of *England*-men shou'd expect the Queen to break Her Word with some of Her Subjects to oblige others; and that whereas She has promis'd them Her Special Favour, they shou'd not be content with that, unless She will at the same time Oppress Two Millions of her Faithful People to oblige them.

Let them go on, but let them be assur'd the Dissenters shall enjoy their Liberty of Conscience, till they can prevail with Her Majesty to lay aside Her Veracity, and forget Her Royal Word, and refuse us Her Protection, which we are resolved never to give Her any Reason for.

As to the Bill against Occasional Conformity, it baulks their Design on the Dissenters, for 'tis for their Advantage; they always dislik'd the Practice; it has more than once been Protested against, and Exploded; and I dare



undertake not one Dissenter offers to present a Petition to the House against its Passing.

'Tis plain, that Occasional Communion is contrary to the very Nature and Being of a Dissenter; who, if he can Conform, ought to Conform; and if he can for a Place of Preferment, ought to do it without that Preferment.

'Tis plain, that whatever, by the Connivance of Remiss Ministers, and with too much Regard to Parties, may have been slightly pass'd over, yet by the very Constitution and Foundation of a Collected, Separate, Church or Congregation, no Man can go back to the Communion of the Church of *England*, and be receiv'd again upon any other Condition but as a Penitent; 'tis an Act Destructive of all possible Pretence for Dissenting, and never was, nor never can, be defended by any Dissenter, without overthrowing all the Reasons they cou'd ever give for Dissenting.

How then can this Bill be aim'd at the Dissenters; either they who think 'tis aim'd at them, are Mistaken; or they that point it at them, are Mistaken; for Suppressing an Error crept in among them, contrary to their Constitution, against their Judgment, declar'd by them to be a Grievance, can never be their Injury, nor ought not to be their Trouble.



Let them name us the Dissenter that ever vindicated this Practice, one passionate Author excepted; let them tell us the Time when any Congregation receiv'd such a Conforming Nonconformist without Dissatisfactions and Discontents; let them tell us a Time whenever the thing was practic'd till the Reign of King *James*.

'Tis a Novelty, an Abuse crept in among us, and we are glad to have it condemn'd by Authority; at the same Time not at all thinking our selves oblig'd to the Authors for their Good Will.

'Twill be objected, this is a Feint, to close with a thing when you cannot help it.

No, Gentlemen, we don't tell you we like that part of the Bill which Excludes us from the Native Honours and Preferments of our Country, which are our Due, our Birthright, equally with our Neighbours, and to which we should be call'd by the Suffrage of the People; and we cannot but think it a Hardship beyond the Power of Reason to justify; but since this Right must be clogg'd with so many Inconveniencies, that we must Mortgage our Consciences to enjoy them, no Man can have any Charity left for us, but must presently conclude we shall freely forego such Trifles for our Consciences, or else that we have no Consciences at all.



Therefore 'tis no Feint ; we are so content with the Suppressing the Grievance of this Scandalous *Ambo-dexter Conformity*, that we think the Hardships put upon us with it not worth naming ; we doubt not the Parliament will one time or other see Cause to do us Justice, and to restore to us the Privileges of our Ancestors, and which we have done nothing to forfeit.

But all the Parliaments that ever were, or will be, can never Suppress any thing among us so Scandalous to our Reputation, and to that Candour with which we desire to Guide our Actions, nor so Contrary to, and Destructive of, the very Nature of our separating from the Church of *England*, and the Constitution of all our Collected Congregations.

We acknowledge, that if this was an allow'd Practice among us, we cou'd not pretend the Character of a Dissenter I have here given to be Just ; but without Question it is a most Just Character of all those Dissenters who are Consciencious and Honest ; 'tis the Original, the Nature, of a Dissenter ; what is crept in more is a Corruption, and we wish it Extinguished ; and since none has said any thing of this Nature but what has been said before, and no Church of *England*-Man can think or speak worst of it



it than the truly Religious Dissenters have done, we freely dismiss all those who can thus Build with one Hand, and Pull Down with another, to a Liberty of declaring for the future who they are for.

Only pursuant to what has all along been acknowledg'd, so far as we have handl'd this Argument, if they wou'd accept of the Friendly Advice of their Brethren, it should be, that they would for the future Conform to the Church of *England*.

For 'tis plain, he that can Conform to the Church to qualifie himself for Preferment, for Employment, or any other such Reason, can Conform; if not, he must be arrived to a Degree of Mastership over his Conscience, so as to subject it to his Interest, and act against Light; and he that can do that, may do any thing, and 'tis no Matter what Church he Communicates with; of such a Man I think I Trespas not upon Charity to say, he has all his Work of Religion to do over again; and he also may Conform till God shall give his Conscience Light enough to chuse by, and him Grace to be Obedient to the Convictions of his own Heart; and whether that be to Conform or Dissent, let him judge for himself.

But



But if any Man who has Profest himself a Religious Dissenter, shall, upon the Passing this Act, declare himself Resolv'd to return to the Dissenters, I think no Congregation of Dissenters, according to the Nature of Religious Communion, can receive him upon any other Terms than as a Penitent.

*If he has not Sinn'd, why shou'd he Repent?*  
Says a Learned Author in this very Case.

I answer, he either has Sinn'd in Conforming, or he Sinn'd in Dissenting before, or he Sins in coming off; for if he did not Sin in Conforming, he ought to have continued there, and his coming off is a plain Schism; but if he did Sin, he ought to acknowledge the Sin, which is what I mean by being receiv'd as a Penitent.

I am told after all this, but upon what Authority do you write thus? You take upon you to write in the Name of the Dissenters, what Commission have you to write in the Plural? And how do we know that the Dissenters disown this Occasional Communion?

I answer, Publication is an Appeal to the World; if I have wrote what is not true, or affirm'd that in the Name of the Dissenters which is not their Opinion, I am liable to an easie Confutation; but as I have never yet had my Argument refuted, so though



I have not received a Formal Commission, Truth is a General Commission, and any Man may write it.

And yet I am not without a general Concurrence of all the Dissenters I ever convert with ; and he that can answer the Argument is welcome to make his Negative as publick as this, and let the World judge who is in the Right.

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*F I N I S.*

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